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CAG discusses ongoing purpose

■ Group's concerns center on waning attendance

Responding to concerns about declining attendance at meetings, the Libby Community Advisory Group last week discussed ways to renew its focus and increase participation.

CAG meeting facilitator Gerald Mueller reminded the group of its two-fold purpose, adopted shortly after the group was formed by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2000, to provide a conduit for communications between the community and EPA and to provide advice and recommendations to the EPA and other entities such as Montana's congressional delegation. He invited suggestions on possible additions to the purpose statement.

Suggestions from the CAG included facilitating the creation of new organizations as needed, causing the release of information and serving as a point of contact for the governor and others.

Any organizations spawned from the CAG should report back to the CAG, said Gordon Sullivan.

"I look at this being the group where everything started and where everything should come back," he said.

Addressing the issue of declining participation, Gayla Benefield read letters she draft-

ed and sent to city and county officials and representatives of community groups, encouraging attendance at CAG meetings.

The CAG reviewed a list of possible work topics prepared by Mueller, including the port authority site utilization plan, the declaration of a public health emergency, funding for long-term health care, the operation and maintenance plan for the Libby Superfund cleanup, the status of cleanups, the cleanup budget and funding, the EPA administrator's visit, analytical methods, risk assessment and the development of a clinical research facility for asbestos-related disease.

LeRoy Thom said it's important for the group to have an informational agenda for each meeting.

"I think that's going to be something that's important to get people to come and attend again," he said.

Attendance might be improved if topics for discussion were publicized in advance

of a meeting, said local EPA project manager Jim Christiansen.

"Right now the perception is we're going to come here, I'm going to give an update and everyone's going to whine about something," he said.

Christiansen offered a tongue-in-cheek response to a CAG member's suggestion that long-term cleanup options for the former W.R. Grace vermiculite mine be added to the group's list of work topics.

"What I was thinking for the mine site was cover it in two feet of money, because that would probably be cheaper than cleaning it up," he said.